DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 265 960 PS 015 624

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TITLE Human Development: The Early Years.
INSTITUTION Alberta Dept. of Education, Edmonton. Early Childhood Services.
PUB DATE 15 Jul 84
NOTE 45p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Child Development; Cognitive Style; Communication Skills; *Cultural Influences; Early Childhood Education; Ethnic Groups; Foreign Countries; Language Acquisition; Play; *School Readiness; *Social Environment; *Social Problems; *Theories
IDENTIFIERS *Canada; Piagetian Theory

ABSTRACT

This study paper discusses (1) changing emphases and current interpretations of child development; (2) the context of family, culture, and education within which children develop; (3) the transition to school; and (4) new issues concerning children, parents, and teachers in society today. Section 1 establishes 1959 as an approximate turning point at which child development research began to emphasize cognitive development. Discussion focuses on the impact of Piaget's theory, Weikart's use of Piaget's theories, the environmental views of Basil Bernstein, and Smedslund's critique of Piaget. Section 2 describes the child in the social, physical, institutional, and symbolic worlds; subsequent discussion gives special attention to communication and the acquisition of language. Section 3 explores implications of brain research for determining children's readiness for school, focusing especially on the views of Bernice McCarthy concerning different functions of brain hemispheres. Her model for looking at different learning styles and modes of processing information is described along with other aspects of her work, including the need to evaluate children learning differently through different styles. Section 4 concerns issues such as changes in family and parent role, gender development, peer influences, racial awareness, minority children in Alberta, child rearing, the special problems of adolescents, and implications for schools. (RH)

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: The Early Years

Prepared by Early Childhood Services
for
Early Childhood Services
Alberta Education
Edmonton, July 15, 1984

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: The Early Years

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: THE EARLY YEARS

I. Changing emphases and current interpretations

child development = human development

When we are speaking of child development, whether of early childhood, middle childhood, or adolescence, we are speaking of some segment or aspect of *human* development: we are speaking about the development of human beings in a particular time-span of the total life-span that extends from birth to death; and also about the development *as* human beings in relation with other human beings and within the particular society and culture into which they have been born. The larger questions — what it means to be a human being and not just a biological organism, what it means to be a person in a particular family, community, society, and culture — are therefore always in the background. They influence our observation of children, what we see as being worthy of note and what we fail to see.

definition of "current"

When we speak of *current* thinking and research in child development we must not confine ourselves to the details of research carried out, but must look at the larger vision which informs the research. We must also not give too narrow a definition to the term "current". Ideas change over a long period of time. New notions about how children develop exist side by side with old notions, and often there are contradictions that remain unresolved. It may take a long time before we can recognize all the implications of new ideas and new observations, and whether new ideas really are so new. When we speak of "current" here, we do not mean the last two or five years, but rather something like twenty-five years or more. To recognize the "thrust" of research into child development we need to be able to look back from where we are now to an earlier period and forward to where our present ideas might lead us if we follow through on them.

A convenient date to start with is 1959. In that year O. G. Brim published a book (1) which gave a comprehensive account of parent education in the United States up to that time — parent education being the education of parents to enable them to promote the optimum development of their own children.

physical health

In the first forty years of this century there had been strong emphasis on safe-guarding the physical well-being of children. This is understandable given the high death rate among infants and young children early in the century.

mental health

In the period between 1945 (end of Second World War) and 1959 there developed a strong new emphasis, which was to promote mental health. Parents were not only to be helped to become knowledgeable about the physical growth and health of young children, but above all to learn what was necessary for safeguarding the mental health of the child. Just as physical health was mainly seen as absence of disease or absence of debilitating physical conditions, so mental health was seen mainly as absence of mental illness (disorder) or absence of debilitating mental conditions. Parents were to be made aware of the causes and consequences of severe emotional conflicts, of withdrawal and aggressiveness, of antisocial behaviour (delinquency), of rebelliousness, and maladjustment, and to learn how to help their children to adjust. Agencies such as nursery schools, day care centres and play schools were also strongly influenced by mental health ideas of that time.

development of the whole child

Noticeably absent was any stress on the intellectual (or cognitive) aspect of children's development. In fact, there appears to have been a generally held view that promoting intellectual development could only be done through formal teaching. The best way to prepare for what the school was to do later was to let the child enter the school mentally healthy and happy. Nursery schools — where middle-class parents sent their pre-schoolers — were to offer an environment for the development of the whole child, with an emphasis particularly on emotional and social development. There was general concern about "readiness for school", and there were many warnings about the dangers of exposing children too early to the formal learning demands made by the traditional school.

readiness for school

intellectual development

At the time when Brim completed his book the emphasis in child development research was changing and was soon to lead to dramatic shifts in interpretation of what was to be considered as important in the development of children. How children develop intellectually, i.e. how they come to be able

to think in new and more advanced ways, as they grow to adulthood, became the main thrust of research for many investigators. The name of the great Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1979) is most closely linked to the new direction in research. Piaget started his extensive work on cognitive development of children in the early 1920's. His early work, quickly translated into English, aroused interest in North America for a short while, but was soon neglected. However, rather suddenly in the late 1950's Piaget's ideas became very influential in North America. It is hardly a coincidence that this was at the beginning of the Space Age, when the Soviet launching of Sputnik seemed to imply a superior education system as far as the training of scientists and engineers was concerned. The criticism of the schools that followed focussed mainly on the lack of attention to intellectual challenge in the schools (2). Piaget's work on the cognitive development of children from birth to adulthood seemed to be particularly relevant to educators wanting to understand the characteristics of children's thinking at successive age levels and the conditions necessary for the acquisition of knowledge and for optimum intellectual development.

continuity in intellectual development

Piaget's theory and description of cognitive development had a special appeal to early childhood educators. There were probably two aspects of Piaget's theory that made it particularly attractive. Firstly, it highlighted the connection between very early (and seemingly trivial) actions of the infant and the young child and the forms of thinking that develop later; thus it focussed the attention of educators and parents on what specifically to observe in infants (birth to 2 years: sensori-motor stage) and in pre-schoolers (2 to 7 years: pre-operational stage) if they wished to provide an environment to ensure optimum cognitive development.

child's own active involvement

Secondly, at the same time the theory stressed the importance of the child's own active involvement and experience in a variety of activities as the basis for cognitive development. Piaget sees new, more advanced ways of thinking as arising "spontaneously" and through the child's own activity, and *not* as a result of formal teaching (3).

importance of environment for intellectual development

Formal teaching for young children was thus ruled out. Piaget's views therefore reinforced what had already become a tradition in most nursery schools for children of the middle classes in the era before 1960, namely that the pre-school child should be provided with the right environment in which to develop, but should not be formally taught nor "pushed". What was new was

the concern that the environment should specifically provide opportunities for experiences of a kind that would nurture intellectual development.

programs to enrich environment for underprivileged

But what about the cognitive development of children who live in environments that offer little in the way of intellectual stimulation? In the early 1960's educators and politicians were much concerned about scholastic failure and the high incidence of mental "retardation" of children from economically depressed areas, minorities and generally disadvantaged communities. Since Piaget's theory asserted that cognitive development depends on interacting with the environment, and since early cognitive development was seen as leading in sequential (and invariant) steps and stages to the more advanced ways of thinking ("cognitive structures"), it seemed that it ought to be possible to go into these communities and provide children, even as early as in infancy, with experiences that would accelerate their intellectual development. This seemed reasonable despite the fact that Piaget himself was always critical of attempts to accelerate cognitive development. A number of programs were designed especially for children in disadvantaged communities. They were known under different names: compensatory education programs, head start programs, intervention programs, or simply child development programs.

intervention programs

Many of the more ambitious intervention programs used Piaget's theory for the planning of experiences and goals to be achieved by infants and young children. Among the most ambitious research programs in North America were those of Weikart in Michigan, who used Piaget's theories extensively (4). He designed not one but a series of programs for infants and pre-schoolers, in order to compare alternative forms of working with children. He monitored the progress of children while in the program and followed up their progress in elementary and in high school. The purpose of such research was to demonstrate to governments and politicians that even in dollar terms (let alone human terms) the vast expenditure in the pre-school years led to lower costs in the school years when there would be less need for expensive remedial services and special education. He did in fact provide impressive evidence to prove his point. In comparing alternative forms of working with children, the important fact emerged that the best results were achieved when the parents were given a very active role in interacting with their pre-school

cooperation between "expert" and parent

children, but that a great deal also depended on how the cooperation between "expert" and parent was handled.

the training of the senses and intellectual development

It would be claiming too much to say that the underlying ideas of pre-school programs were all solely inspired by Piaget. Interest in cognitive development also led to the re-discovery of the educational writings of Maria Montessori (1870-1952), who had developed her ideas on the relation between the training of the senses and intellectual development while working as a physician with children in very poor working class communities in Naples. Montessori's ideas were congruent with Piaget's thinking. In fact, Piaget's first book was based on research carried out in a Montessori kindergarten attached to the Institute in Geneva where Piaget had been appointed to a professorship (5).

importance of language and social background for cognitive development

Inspiration of a very different kind came around 1960 from Basil Bernstein, an educational sociologist in London, England. He emphasized the importance of language for the intellectual development of a child, but he also stressed the importance of the social context in which language is acquired and developed. To back up his theory he provided instructive examples of the scope and limitations of the language used by children from the lower classes (6).

genetic psychologist versus child psychologist

Of course, Piaget also refers to language and the impact of the environment though usually in rather vague terms. What we must realize is that Piaget did not intend to address the question of individual differences between children, nor questions regarding differences due to growing up in one culture rather than another or as a member of one social class rather than another, except as these might affect the rate of development. Piaget was not interested in the individual unique child in his or her own concrete life-world. He saw himself not as a child psychologist, but as a genetic psychologist and a genetic epistemologist interested in how structures of thinking that the mature logician, mathematician and scientist display are gradually "constructed" by children in the course of their development. It is therefore a very one-sided concern with the development of children, a concern more with the child as "thinker" and the formal characteristics of that thinking than with the child as a

person in a particular society, culture, place and time. Those who work with children as educators or as child psychologists or as clinical psychologists find that the emphasis on the universality and invariance of sequences and stages of cognitive development can easily narrow their vision too much, so that they fail to see and to attend to aspects of a child's behaviour and life-situation that do not fit the conceptual framework of Piaget.

A noted Swedish psychologist, Smedslund, who spent some time in Geneva and carried on research within the framework of the Piagetian vision of development for many years, has described how his own experience as an applied psychologist attempting to understand and to help children gradually forced him to re-evaluate many of Piaget's tenets. He writes:

> Working with children during my Piagetian period I felt constrained to be detached, one-sidedly cognitive and entirely focussed upon certain abstract aspects of performance. What mattered to me then were the formal logical structures rather than the concrete living children in their total life situations. (7)

the concrete child in his/her total life situation

The views expressed by Smedslund are shared by many applied psychologists and educators. In fundamental developmental research too, the emphasis of a number of well-known researchers has shifted to seeing the child first and foremost as a social being in his own life-world, and to the centrality of interpersonal commitments for every aspect of the child's functioning and development: communicative and language competence, awareness of self and self-concept, and emotional, motivational, and intellectual functioning.

infant-mother interaction

Much of this research involves the observation and analysis of infant-mother interactions recorded on videotape and film. It shows how normal infants are perfectly attuned to other human beings, and how communication between mother and infant takes place at a pre-speech level. It shows that at two months of age already the infant is not just the recipient of the mother's attention; the infant frequently initiates the exchange. Words such as intersubjectivity, reciprocity, dialogue, co-action and co-responding are central to this look at human development. Infants and children of all ages are not being introduced to *the* world, but to the typically *human* world as interpreted, understood, felt, and shaped by human beings (8).

II. The context of family, culture, and education within which children develop

child - world

If we want to understand the development of a child we must look at both the nature and the potentialities of the child on the one hand and at the world in which the child will grow up on the other. Ashley Montagu has said:

> The organic potentialities do not develop at all in the absence of environmental influences. This is true of physical potentialities; it is even more true of mental ones. The development of the mental potentialities presents virtually infinite possibilities under the action of varying environments . . . (9).

aspects of "world"

"World" and "environment" are global terms, and we need to make some distinctions in order to specify what the aspects or components are that have special relevance to the development of human beings.

the world of people

There is first of all the world of people, of persons, of other human beings: mother, father, siblings, relatives, friends, neighbours and casual acquaintances, nurses, doctors, strangers, etc.

the physical world

Second, there is the physical world: the immediate space that surrounds the child, and the more remote world that also exists — the natural world and the man-made world, which in our technological age becomes ever more prominent.

society and social institutions

Third, society and social institutions: wherever people live together, roles and status become defined; rules and laws are agreed upon; institutions are created (e.g. churches, schools, law courts and police force, governments and armies, etc.).

the symbolic world

Fourth, and very importantly, human beings live not only among people, in a physical world, and in a society; they also live in a symbolic world. Human beings have symbol systems: they have language, and they are story tellers and they create poetry and drama; they express themselves in visual art; they reflect on life and death and interpret the human condition and the

deepest concerns of human beings in religious teachings and practice; they interpret nature and the forces of nature in terms of the symbolic system we call science; and they have developed mathematics.

individual differences at birth

This, then, is the world into which the child is born. It exists before the child exists, but it is in this world that the child, as he or she grows into adulthood, will have to find meaning and lead a meaningful life. Children come into this world with many different potentialities. There are individual differences among children right at birth, and what becomes of the potentialities depends, as Montagu said, on the "action of varying environments". The

impact of adult caregivers

human care-givers constitute the most important part of the environment. Without a secure base in a personal relationship with an adult, who anticipates the child's needs and communicates with the child, a child cannot thrive. Research on temperamental characteristics of children shows that mothers will react differently to the same kind of temperament displayed by an infant at birth. In one case the response of a mother to an overreacting infant may be such that the child becomes even more overreactive. In another case the mother may, either because this is natural due to her own temperament, or deliberately because she realizes what it is that her baby needs, respond with calming behaviour that gradually reduces the overactivity of the child (10).

importance of personal relationships

In research on children who have been diagnosed as having minimal brain damage it has been shown that the development of such children varies a great deal, depending on the quality of care they receive (11). Infants and young children who have very little interaction with an older person do not thrive. Samuel Kirk reported many years ago on an experiment in an orphanage, where the staff had hardly any time for interacting with the infants. Some of the infants were then "assigned" to adolescent girls in the orphanage who were themselves of quite low intelligence, and the girls were asked to interact with them. As a result of this activity, the infants improved very remarkably in all areas of their functioning. Long-term follow-up studies indicated that at age nineteen those who had had the extra personal attention in their infancy were well ahead of those who had not had this experience, both in their educational achievement and their general competence (12).

importance of communication and acquisition of language

If we accept this view of the child as first and foremost a social being and recognize the centrality of interpersonal commitment, then it follows that in looking at development we need to pay special attention to communication and the acquisition of language. It is through communication that an intersubjective world is built up and shared, and it is through language that the child gains access to the symbolic world and comes to participate in culturally transmitted knowledge and interpretation of the world.

language development

Therefore, we turn now to language development in the child aged two to five. After what has been said above about individual differences among children and among caretaking environments, it should be clear that age norms for milestones in this development would be misleading. It is much more important to understand what function language is serving and in what ways the increasing use of language by the child involves all other aspects of development and the child's relationship to his or her world.

expansion of the child's world

For children aged two to five the world which becomes accessible and comprehensible expands at an incredible rate. Being mobile, children can explore so many more objects in their immediate environment, and venture beyond that immediate physical environment. The really dramatic expansion occurs, however, because language acquisition usually shows marked acceleration at about the age of two. The child now expresses more and more of his or her wants in language, and refers to things, events and experiences and comments on them. Under normal circumstances children from two to five years old learn to use about 2000 to 3000 words and to comprehend many more. Children also learn to form their speech utterances according to the "rules" for sentence formation and grammar. Children will not be able to formulate what the rules are but their correction of their own mistakes, which they notice as they speak, shows that they are aware of deviations from a "rule". The rules as such remain implicit for the child as they do for most adults, who also obey the inherent rules but have difficulty in making these rules explicit.

vocabulary

sentence construction and grammar

different uses of language

Language is used in different contexts and serves different functions. In many situations where two adults are together a record of their speech utter-

ances alone, divorced from any knowledge of what the speakers are doing and of the context in which they are speaking would be unintelligible to a listener or reader. Speech is interwoven with shared previous experience and with present acts and behaviour and purposes that are taken for granted by the speakers. Much of the speech of pre-school children occurs under similar circumstances, and it is therefore understood at first only by the adult who is close to the child and knows the context in which the single words and simple phrases are being uttered. "Gimme!" is easily identified as "give me!" but what it is the child is asking for depends on one's seeing what the child is pointing to or reaching for or on one's knowledge of what the child "usually" wants. Under these circumstances a single "word" like "gimme" can contain a message which, when expressed fully in language, would require a whole sentence, such as "Give me the picture book from the shelf which I cannot reach!" Children, not unlike many adults, also accompany what they are doing by comments on what they are doing: "not here!", "now the hammer!", "not here, there!", "like it!", etc. The examples given so far are of what James Britton calls language used by speakers as participants in events in the here and now. This kind of speech depends for its understanding on the situation and ongoing actions; and the speech itself is mingled with action (13).

speaker as participant

There is another way in which language is used by a speaker, namely as "spectator" of his or her own experience as well as that of others. A person speaks about experiences he or she has had and "narrates" them to others, thus inviting them to become spectators of the same experiences. But people speak not only of their **past** experiences and make "a good story" out of them; they also talk about their hopes and projects for the **future**, and share them with others. Children also want and need to talk about what they recollect and what they anticipate. Very soon their language is no longer only participant language, tied to the concrete situation and the here and now. They begin to talk about what happened in the past, about what "will" happen tomorrow, about other places, about what they have been told, about stories that have been read to them, about what happened in make-believe play. In other words they begin to be able to speak about that which transcends the here and now but is of vital and continuing interest to them in the here and now. Talking about all this is a means of ordering and interpreting their experiences.

speaker as spectator

language models

self-concept

To talk in this way children need other persons who are willing to listen to what they are trying to say and to engage in conversation with them. The child needs language models, such as only a more experienced speaker can provide. But something else is probably much more important, namely that the person who really listens and responds is giving to the child the message: what you are saying is worth listening to because you are a person worth caring for. Thus the child's awareness of self increases and the self-concept is strengthened.

playing with language

There is another aspect to the child's use of language: the child plays with language and by playing with it and enjoying it, learns to use language more subtly. Ruth Weir made tape recordings of the pre-sleep monologues of her two-and-a-half-year-old son Anthony lying in his crib with no one to talk to (14). Anthony makes many utterances before finally he falls asleep. In some of these he is referring to events of the day, to Father and Mother and Bobo, the teddy bear. But much of what he says is also just play with sounds and with linguistic forms and patterns. Here follow a few examples: "blanket — like-a-lipstick; bink — let Bobo bink — bink ben bink — blue kink; what color — what color blanket — what color mop — what color glass." The delight children show when they listen to nursery rhymes and nonsense verse reflects the same pleasure in playing with language. Children have fun with language, and if they can share this fun with other people, all the better.

language, thinking, and knowledge

child's search for meaning

Finally, special mention must be made of the relation between language, the development of thinking, and knowledge. Thinking does not develop in a vacuum, but as a result of interaction with the environment and as a result of active involvement in trying to make sense of, and cope with, new experiences. So much is happening so fast in the life of the young child that if the child is not to be overwhelmed, he or she must relate the experiences to each other in order to develop a *coherent* world of meaning. That is exactly what children try to do, and that is why children commonly ask so many questions and are so persistent in asking the same question over and over again or in different variations. The manner in which those questions are answered, or whether they are answered at all, may make a big difference to the further thinking of the child as well as to the child's confidence in his or her ability to understand

and cope with new knowledge. Maybe in our time too much tension and restlessness are produced in children through exposure to an excess of stimulation and information and insufficient opportunities for children to integrate the information in personally meaningful ways. The role of the parent or other caregiver or educator is crucial in this regard.

words, concepts introduced by parents

Language makes available to the child words and concepts that, if they are brought to the child at the right moment, can give new direction to the child's thinking and open up new questions. There is a study of a boy between the ages of three and five (15) in which detailed records were kept of everything the child did or said or asked in connection with his interest in, and understanding of, phenomena that later in school are dealt with under the general heading of "science". Such phenomena include, for instance, fire and smoke, water, steam and fog, how the body functions, death and decay, the shape of the earth and the law of gravity, etc. What the records show very clearly is that the boy's interest was always aroused by something that surprised or frightened or fascinated him, and that once such an interest had been aroused, it was taken up again on all sorts of occasions and pursued for weeks, months and even for well over a year. For instance, questions about water, steam and fog, fire and heat, and evaporation were very persistent, and show how the words that he was given (e.g., steam, smoke) made him look more closely at smoke and steam, which at first he was always confusing with each other, until he could clearly differentiate between them. But when this differentiation occurred there were new puzzles that had to be sorted out: he saw steam rising from a kettle in which water was boiling, and wanted to know what was happening to the water. Father threw in a new word, "evaporate". The little boy's first response was to repeat the word a number of times, to play with its rhythm and sound, but then came the question "What is 'evaporate'?" The word set his thinking off in new directions, and over a period of time he made further differentiations: heat is required to make water boil, fire produces smoke, but heat and fire are not the same. Words acted as a "lure for cognition".

Just as the child can be overwhelmed by too many experiences a child can be overwhelmed by too many words brought in indiscriminately and at the

wrong moment. The parents of the same boy found out very early that if they pressured him to speak when he was not ready or when they gave him long verbal explanations in response to a question, then he lost interest rapidly. It has been said that "language itself, like the parents, can open or obscure the world" (16).

acquisition of knowledge in pre-school years and in school

In their pre-school years children acquire a great deal of knowledge that later the school can build on, extend and develop more systematically. In the school the same issues arise as before: there has to be the right balance between, on the one hand, the child's own interaction with the environment and active search for coherent meaning, and on the other hand, the words and concepts that are introduced by the teacher to give direction to the search. Piaget was always a critic of parents and teachers who rely too much on words and on straight teaching and explanation. Many people, on the other hand, become suspicious of teachers and of schools when the emphasis is more on the self-activity of the child and apparently not enough on the "teaching" of identifiable skills and items of knowledge that the children are supposed to acquire at school. What we have to realize is that such an either-or formulation of the issue totally misses the point of how children learn. It is not a case of one or the other but of both. What is most important is that the new skills and new knowledge must become personally meaningful to the child and lead to the desire for further learning.

play

We have mentioned play of children only in passing, in connection with children's uses of language. Likewise the child's growing awareness of self has not yet been given the attention it deserves. The following is an attempt to do justice to both, because in reality it is through play that children explore their world and learn about themselves. Navarra, who gave us the account of the small boy, from which we quoted previously, has this to say about play:

play and conceptual development

"During play the child seemed to become self-involved in meaningful activity . . . . The child concentrated . . . . The study of play activity became the most important device by which insight was gained concerning the conceptual development of the child." Since Navarra was interested in conceptual development he had an eye for the kind of spontaneous play that involved the formation of scientific concepts. There are many other kinds of play, some of

seeing - being seen games

them so traditional, played over many generations and in many countries, that we take them for granted and think no more about them. Two "games" which seem to be played universally — one between adult or older children and infant, the other in a group of children of varying ages — are "peekaboo" and "hide and seek". Recently, psychologists and educators have become very interested in such "seeing, being seen" games (17). What makes this kind of play so interesting for the players (and for psychologists and educators too)?

play and self-identity

Both peekaboo and hide and seek involve hiding and mutual seeking, i.e. seeing and knowing that you are being looked for. Peekaboo is a game of playfully denying and then re-affirming each other's presence. Both adult and child avert the gaze or face or part of the body or pretend not to see each other, and then suddenly "find" each other again and rejoice in this mutual re-affirmation. Looking without being looked at, one is anonymous; one must exist in the eyes of the other, in order to be aware of self as a separate person but in a relation with another person. As the authors of "The World Through Children's Eyes: Hide and Seek and Peekaboo" (18) put it: "Peekaboo begins with, hey, that's me! With awareness of self-identity".

being separate as well as part of a group

knowledge and skills used to purpose in play

Hide and seek involves many more actors and is played by children who are already of school-going age. There are agreed upon rules, but adults are not involved in making or enforcing the rules. The game requires a suitable physical environment in which it is possible to hide. Messy environments with long grass and shrubs and trees and junk lying about are more suitable than large expanses of well kept lawn. Children have a way of finding such places, even though modern cities often make it difficult for them to find places that are also safe. In some ways hide and seek is similar to peekaboo, in that in both of them self-awareness and personal relationships are being tested and re-affirmed. In hide and seek there is a tension between being separate (the child in its own secret hiding place) and the desire to be part of the group (the child in the hiding place would be very upset if the child playing the part of "it" stopped searching for him or her, for that would mean that he or she is not worth looking for). To play the game properly, a great deal of knowledge and skill is required: children need to know each other's characteristics

and sense each other's intentions, they need to be able to judge from which perspective they can be seen, and they need to become familiar with the space in which they are moving so as to be able to move quickly and fast at the right moment.

Play and its role in the life of the young child must be taken very seriously by parents, child care workers, and teachers. Play and make-believe are the child's dominant mode of being-in-the-world, and throughout life poeple need to be able to play and imagine possibilities. This does not mean, however, that parents and teachers must constantly think of clever games to teach the child what they think children ought to be learning. The initiative must remain with the child, and the adult must be able to pick up the cues from the child.

III. Transition to school

priorities in current child development studies

As we have seen, in the child development literature today the emphasis is on understanding the whole child in his or her world. At the centre of what we distinguish as separate aspects of development (physical, emotional, social, communicative and linguistic, intellectual) is the child as a person in relation to other persons and acting in his or her world, making sense of the world and being helped to do so. Development also extends over *time*. The child's body grows and changes and this affects what the child can do and wants to do in his or her physical environment. The environment of children also changes in the course of time: some pre-schoolers begin to spend part of the day away from home, in day care centres or nursery schools or kindergarten; all children must make the transition to school. Transition to school is a major event in the life of every child.

traditional priorities of schools

Schools are social institutions which traditionally have placed the emphasis on knowledge and skills, and on attitudes and the kind of conduct that society regards as important. Those psychologists and educators who stress the need for the development of the whole child, as well as for the child's own active role in making sense of his or her world, do not de-emphasize conventional knowledge and skills and socially acceptable behaviour. They agree

structuring of learning environment

also that formal structured teaching has an important part to play in the child's acquisition of new knowledge. What they emphasize, however, is that formal teaching methods are not the only ones, and that the whole of the learning environment needs to be structured in such a way that children can retain their autonomy and initiative and can search for personal relevance of new knowledge. The learning environment consists not only of the physical space (the classroom, the learning centres and planned spatial setups, the corridors and playground, etc.) but also of the human environment, i.e. of the relationships that are fostered between the teachers and their pupils, among the children themselves, and between the teachers and the parents and the community.

readiness for school learning

Problems in the transition from home and kindergarten to elementary school have frequently been discussed in the research literature. When it is found that certain children do not adapt readily to the demands of the school, there is a tendency to look for the cause of the difficulty in the children. For decades it was believed that many children were simply not "ready" for school, and diagnostic instruments for assessing "readiness for school learning" were created and used (19). There was research which purported to show that children with a mental age of less than six years were not yet able to cope with the formal learning that was expected in school (20). Since children differed in their innate ability and their rate of maturation, it meant that there would always be many children who would not be "mature" enough to meet the demands of the school at the legally defined entrance age. Consequently, in many school systems children were placed in separate streams on the basis of an assessment of their school readiness. This method of dealing with the transition to school has quite rightly been abandoned, because it tended to perpetuate the difference in abilities with which the children came to school; in far too many cases the original diagnoses turned out to be self-fulfilling prophecies (21).

the failure of streaming

relevance of brain research

In recent years there have been interesting findings in brain research which have some implications for our understanding of the cognitive development of children and which cast an interesting light on the specific problem of readiness for school at the age legally defined in North America and Western Europe for admission to the elementary school.

enriched stimulation and the growth of the brain

The fact that there is a reciprocal relation between environmental stimulation and the development of the brain structure and changes in the biochemistry of the brain has been known for quite some time (22). Experiments made on animals (mainly rats) demonstrated that enriched stimulation and opportunities for interaction actually increased the size of the brain, and especially of the cerebral cortex, and influenced also the biochemistry of the brain. This means that there is obviously a two-way influence: experience changes the complexity of the brain, and the development of the brain makes possible new behaviour patterns and permits new ways of coping with experience. Although these discoveries were made in animal experiments which cannot be repeated with children, child psychologists and educators were nevertheless intrigued by these findings. It seemed quite feasible that the child's brain might react in a similar fashion to an enriched environment which offered opportunities for greater interaction and more varied experiences. One could even speculate that when the child enters school, he or she enters into a richer, more stimulating, structured environment, and that this might have a positive influence on the growth of the brain.

growth spurts of the brain and stages in cognitive development

Epstein, a biologist, has also done research on children but he pursues another line (23). As it was known that the general growth of the brain, and especially of the cerebral cortex, alternates between periods of rapid growth and of slow increase, Epstein wanted to establish whether there was a correlation between the times of the measurable growth spurts and the timing of the cognitive stages of development as described by Piaget: at age two, when the representational (symbolic) function becomes prominent; at age five to seven, when Piaget sees concrete operational thinking (logical thinking but still tied to concrete activities) developing; at age eleven to twelve, when formal operational thinking sets in; and again at age fourteen to fifteen, when formal operational thinking reaches a new level. Epstein used two criteria to measure growth spurts: one was the size of the head, especially circumference, which is related to brain size though not identical with it; the other was the measurement by means of an EEG (electroencephalograph) of the electric waves emitted by the brain and known to be involved in thinking and problem solving. He found that there was a fairly good correspondence between the ages when the brain growth spurts occurred and the ages when, according to Piaget, major cognitive changes could be observed.

Epstein's educational conclusions

It is interesting to note that the "normal" (i.e. North American and Western European) and "legal" age for school entry is apparently characterized both by physiological brain development and new cognitive capability. Epstein, like Piaget, does not address the question of individual differences between children nor does he investigate the possible impact of the school on the intellectual development and the growth of the brain. He does, however, give some educational advice. He advocates that teaching should take into account the alternation in speed of growth: new ways of thinking should be introduced when the brain is showing rapid growth; during the intervening periods there should be consolidation of what has already been learnt.

criticism of Epstein's conclusions

Most educators, however, would not find his advice very helpful. Epstein does not take account of individual differences in timing of the growth spurts, but even more importantly, he also assumes a one-way influence: ways of thinking are dependent on brain size and complexity. Recent educational research demonstrates the reciprocal relation between environ-mental stimulation and cognitive development. Following his advice would, therefore, mean depriving children of an important influence on their development.

Another psychologically more convincing and educationally more fruitful contribution based on brain research has been made by Bernice McCarthy. Her ideas on teaching have been inspired — though in part only — by new findings in brain research. The findings in question are those relating to the functioning of the left and the right hemisphere of the brain and of the brain as a whole. The differences between the two hemispheres have been the subject of research for a long time, and in 1981 Roger Sperry was awarded the Nobel Prize for his contribution to the research (24).

different functions of the two hemispheres of the brain

The left hemisphere has been shown to specialize in language and in logical, sequential processing of information. The right hemisphere has been shown to control not only the processing of spatial information, but also to tend towards integration of information and recognition of whole patterns of relationships intuitively rather than by sequential reasoning and logical justification. In the intact brain, however, the two hemispheres work together, complementing each other. Recent work has shown, for instance, that when a

person is faced with a spatial task, more blood flows through *both* hemispheres but rather more to the right than to the left. The blood flow when a person is engaged in a verbal task is also increased for both hemispheres, but more so for the left side.

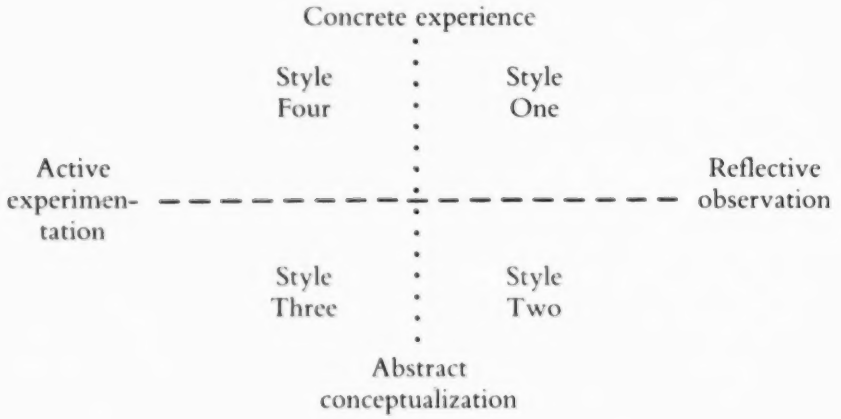
The distinction between verbal and spatial abilities as well as that between logical, sequential ordering of information and a more wholistic "intuitive" processing of information has been around for a long time among psychologists. It has also been asserted before that some people are better at verbal than at spatial tasks, and better at logical, sequential reasoning than at wholistic integration of information. What the new findings from brain research have done is to lend more credibility to these distinctions.

Bernice McCarthy's contribution

Bernice McCarthy was impressed by these and similar findings on brain functioning. As an experienced teacher of children of all ages she had observed different learning styles of children, and she was conversant with the literature on learning styles. She set herself the task of finding out what the commonalities were, and developed a comprehensive model that could be used to recognize learning styles in children and to develop strategies for teaching (25). Since the model applies to children of all ages, it is of interest to us also with regard to the transition from pre-school environment to elementary school.

learning styles

McCarthy discovered that in the literature on learning styles two dimensions were always mentioned (though not always in the same words): the continuum from concrete experiences to abstract conceptualization, and the continuum from reflective observation to active experimentation. Drawing a diagram, McCarthy places the two dimensions on a vertical and a horizontal line which crossing each other produce four quadrants like this:



The learning styles are defined in terms of preference along the two dimensions. The four styles then have the following characteristics:

Style One

Perceive information concretely, process it reflectively (concrete information viewed from many perspectives).

Style Two

Perceive information abstractly, process it reflectively (creating concepts and models).

Style Three

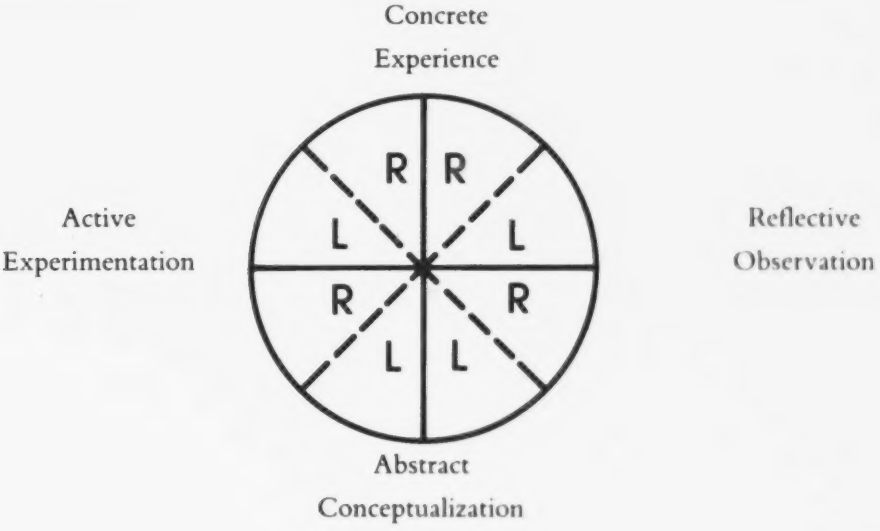
Perceive information abstractly, process it actively (practical application of ideas).

Style Four

Perceive information concretely, process it actively (acting and testing experience, making new things happen).

McCarthy then inserts the distinctions about information processing coming from brain research. She sees the "right brain/left brain" distinction as cutting across *each* of the four learning styles. In diagram form she represents it like this:

learning styles and left/right brain functioning



This, in barest outline, is the basis of McCarthy's model for looking at different learning styles and modes of processing information.

current teaching strategies

In her view in most schools teaching strategies are geared most of the time towards children who prefer Learning Style Two (information perceived abstractly and processed reflectively) and lean towards left brain activity (verbal, logical, sequential). This has two consequences: firstly, children who find that their preferred learning styles are not very effective in meeting the demands for achievement in school may become discouraged and find school learning increasingly irrelevant to what has meaning for them; secondly, those children who prefer Learning Style Two or who have no great difficulty in adopting it are being given a very one-sided training in modes of acquir-

need for children to use all four learning styles

ing knowledge. What McCarthy recommends is that all children must be given the opportunity to use all four learning styles, even though children will keep on having a learning style which they prefer. This point cannot be stressed enough. McCarthy expresses her concern about teachers who want to have diagnostic instruments for determining learning styles of individual children, because teachers would like to match teaching styles to the learning styles of individual children. Her comments on this are:

> Students, if given choices, will reveal their best learning styles through those choices. But their choices only reveal their most comfortable learning penchants at *that* place, at *that* time in *their* level of development in some particular situation.

In another place she says:

> I am often asked to assist teachers in matching teaching styles with student learning styles. I am always hesitant. First, because I do not believe one learning style, however carefully refined, is sufficient without understanding its weaknesses as well as its strengths. My firm conviction . . . is that students need to progress through the entire learning cycle in order to develop the skills that do not come naturally, while refining their own innate gifts.

McCarthy uses the model she has proposed to design strategies of teaching, and she has published lesson plans which illustrate how in the course of a unit of teaching all four learning styles can be activated.

She does not specifically address the implications of her model and its underlying assumptions for the transition from the pre-school level to elementary school. These implications will be addressed in what follows here.

learning styles of children entering school

Pre-school children learn predominantly from concrete experience, and they process information either reflectively (Style One) or actively (Style Four). But, as we saw when we were looking at the young child's attempt to make sense of his or her experience, abstract conceptualization is by no means totally foreign to the young child. When children acquire language, they are already being presented with information through the abstract mode. They get new words and new concepts from answers by adults to their questions, from what is being read to them, and from having facts presented to them. Sometimes the abstract concept, not yet properly understood, becomes

the point of departure for new concrete experiences that the child seeks. So it would be wrong to say that the Abstract Conceptualization styles (Two and Three) are completely alien to the child when he or she enters school. But they are not dominant. Young children cannot sustain abstract conceptualization for long, and they need to return to concrete experience and the context of their own personal world very quickly and often.

importance of context and personal experience out of which abstract thinking arises

In her book *Children's Minds*, Margaret Donaldson, a British psychologist, asks the question: why do many children find school learning difficult? (26). One of the several answers that she gives and explains is that in our scientific and technological culture we place such high value on very abstract modes of thinking that in education we de-emphasize the context of experience and the personal relevance out of which abstract thinking arises and to which it must always return if we are not to become alienated from the world in which we live. Donaldson speaks of "disembedded" thought. We could also speak of "disembodied" thought — thinking processes in themselves, which we no longer see emanating from somebody, from a person in his or her world trying to make sense of that world.

need to address all four learning styles equally

McCarthy has a similar point: the overemphasis on Learning Style Two, which she sees as common in schools, becomes counterproductive even in terms of academic achievement because for many children the knowledge acquired in this style or mode never takes on personal relevance. What is needed, therefore, is that all four learning styles be equally addressed and valued when children enter school.

learning styles and methods of evaluation

There is another aspect to this: what children learn using different learning styles calls for different methods of evaluation. For teaching and learning in Style Two, objective-type questions and written examinations are the usual instruments of evaluation of what has been learnt. A whole testing and examinations industry has arisen around this mode of evaluation. When people assert that academic standards in the schools are declining, they think of scores on tests of information acquired and concepts understood. These are important, but many aspects of what a child has learnt cannot be displayed in such tests. In her examples of lesson plans McCarthy always specifies modes

of evaluation appropriate to each phase of the teaching cycle that addresses different learning styles. For instance, qualitative assessments are called for to determine what a child has created, how the child has applied what he or she knows, and how the child has integrated knowledge acquired through different learning styles and has made it relevant to his or her own life-situation.

What McCarthy says about methods of evaluation is addressed to elementary school teachers and is intended to counteract the narrow emphasis on formal tests and examinations. Though such tests and examinations are not usually a feature of kindergarten practice, an understanding of the differences in learning styles and correlated methods of evaluation is important for the kindergarten teacher also. It can help her/him to encourage the development of new learning styles (not only the preferred one) and also to focus the attention of parents on aspects of the child's progress that they may not have considered before.

IV. **Children, parents, teachers in society today: new issues**

Children growing up in Canada today are in a world that is in many ways different from that in which their parents and their teachers grew up.

changes in family

Changes have occurred, and continue to occur, in the structure of families. In many families both father and mother have employment outside the home. Many mothers seek employment because the family needs a second income; others make a deliberate choice to pursue a career. There is also a dramatic increase in the number of single parent families, and, of course, most single mothers are forced by economic necessity to work outside the home. How are children affected by these changes?

The most obvious way in which they are affected is that the mother (or father, if he is the primary caregiver) has less time with the child, and that parents have to make special arrangements for surrogate care for part of the day.

Research has shown that the reduction of time spent with a child does not necessarily have adverse effects. It is the quality of the interaction between adult caregiver and child while together that counts, even if that time is relatively limited. There must be a time of the day and times in the week when the child experiences the close relationship, dialogue, and communication, which as we have seen are central to all aspects of development.

need for good surrogate care

There is a great need for adequate surrogate care for children today. Parents want to know that while they are at work their children are safe and that they are having new experiences which stimulate them. Day care centres and nursery schools are in great demand, and there are not enough of them. Those that exist vary in quality. Parents and local community leaders need to become involved in exploring the extent of the need for adequate day care in their area and to take the initiative in creating new facilities.

change in roles of men and women

Changes in family structure also involve changes in how the roles of men and women are perceived. Stereotypes about what men do (and are supposed to do) and about what women do (and are supposed to do) are being challenged. Women not only have careers apart from that of mother and homemaker; they also aspire to a wider range of careers, which previously were the preserve of males, and they are not satisfied with remaining in subordinate positions merely because they are women. Many fathers are much more intimately involved in housework and in caring for infants and young children, a role which even today is still seen as the primary responsibility of the "housewife" and mother. Among single parents there are a growing number of men. How are children affected by these changes?

parents as models

Research gives no clear-cut answer to the question (27). How the parents think of the male and the female role will influence how they rear their children. Also children will usually model their own behaviour on that of their parents, and through role play identify the actual behaviours that father and mother display. However, there are major obstacles to changing traditional stereotypes about what men should do and what women should do. One is that other children with whom the child associates may have acquired from their parents a very restrictive view of male and female roles. Most children

twig very early that boys and girls are treated very differently and are expected to behave differently — even though they all may be wearing jeans and sneakers. Another is that children also get stereotypic views from stories read to them and from television. A child may therefore get conflicting messages.

emphasis on human rather than male/ female qualities

One thing that parents can do and that teachers can do is to emphasize specifically human qualities. Being helpful when help is needed, showing compassion and expressing feeling, and being sensitive to other people's feelings are not things we should expect only of girls. To assert oneself when it is necessary, to take risks, and to compete with others when what is being competed for is worthwhile are not things we should expect only of males. Being tough and being gentle, being active and being passive, taking the initiative and being a follower — these are all human characteristics on which neither males nor females have a monopoly. In the end, when children have become adults, they *will* play different roles in society, but these should not be pre-determined by stereotypes about what is male or female, but by what it is that as human beings they can do best and what needs to be done.

influence of peers

However, as already mentioned, children learn not only from parents and teachers, but also from their peers. There is a remarkable study by Raphaela Best entitled *We've All Got Scars* (28) which deals with the influence of peers in an elementary school in the United States. The book is based on intensive participative observation in an elementary school in an affluent community during the years 1973 to 1977. "Participative observation" means that the observer participates in the activities of the group and at the same time observes and tries to be sufficiently detached to be able to interpret what it is she is observing. She must have a relationship of trust with those observed, so that they will "carry on as usual" in their activities and not be embarrassed by the presence of the observer.

reading difficulties and peer pressure

Best, who had had many years of experience as a reading specialist, embarked on the research because she believed that in some way, which she could not yet specify, there was a relationship between the much higher incidence of reading difficulties experienced by boys than by girls and the nature of peer pressure. The information she gathered threw light on the

relationship that interested her, but it also did much more. What she found was that in the early years of elementary school the peer group influence on academic performance in the classroom operated only among boys. This she found to be due to the fact that next to the academic curriculum — reading, writing, arithmetic — there was a second curriculum in operation, which she calls the gender role socialization curriculum. Boys must learn to be boys and girls must learn to be girls. While teachers themselves impose expectations, the children themselves absorb from many sources what the expectations are.

academic curriculum and gender role curriculum

inordinate demands on boys

What Best saw was that inordinate demands were made on boys to become "instant men." In trying to live up to these expectations they sought support from each other. By grade three there had already developed a "club" that excluded all the boys who did not meet certain criteria. Those who were excluded were branded as cry-babies: they had been seen to play with girls, they were too gentle and willing to help the teacher, they were seen as not tough enough and as backing away from confrontations and fights. The boys "in" the club were thoroughly conforming to the traditional "macho" image. The boys who were excluded tried desperately to make friends with the club members who excluded them. Those boys who were excluded were also the poorest readers. The question arises: were boys rejected by the club because they were poor readers or did they become poor readers because they were rejected? What appears to have happened here is that in grades one and two they were among the poorer readers but nevertheless made improvement. When in grade three they were rejected by their peer group, they not only made no improvement in their reading but actually gave up even trying. Moreover, they now began to behave in anti-social ways: stealing things, killing birds and fish and expressing delight in seeing them die, throwing stones at a passenger in a passing train and hitting him, and saying: "Man, that was fun!"

consequences for boys of being rejected by their peers

peer pressures on girls

What Best found in connection with the girls was that in the first few years of elementary school the sex role expectations were less oppressive: peer pressures became problematic for them at a somewhat later stage, starting in grade four. This observation seems to confirm what perceptive teachers have also noted here in Canada.

The research by Best illustrates once again how closely social, emotional, and intellectual development are interwoven.

ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity in Canada

In Canada we have a great diversity of ethnic, cultural, and racial groups, and there are many recently arrived immigrant families from a wide variety of countries. Canadians pride themselves on preserving a cultural mosaic rather than being a melting pot of nations, and officially there is support for cultural groups to preserve their heritage, if that is what they want to do. However, diversity is a strength only if people from different cultural groups learn to understand each other. Currently, in Alberta in particular, there is much concern about the extent of prejudices and discrimination against minorities, especially against people who because of their visible physical characteristics and/or manner of dress are readily identified as members of minorities, for instance, immigrants from Pakistan, India, other Asiatic countries, the Caribbean, and Africa. Racial prejudice has complex roots, and it is not suggested that all these roots must be sought in the early development of children. Nevertheless, parents and child care workers and kindergarten teachers do need to reflect on how children come to be aware of racial and group differences, and how their self-perceptions and perceptions of others are formed.

racial prejudice

emergence of children's awareness of racial differences based on skin colour

As long as children are having all their experiences within the home and family network they cannot know that in other homes and families things are done differently. They will also not know that there are children who differ from them in such visible characteristics as colour of skin. In the U.S.A. a great deal of research has been done on children's awareness of racial differences based on skin colour (29). There is the white child's awareness of the different colour of the black child, and the black child's awareness of the different colour of the white child. It has been shown that children register these differences as early as age three to five years, sometimes even earlier.

influence of adults on racial attitudes

Together with this awareness come feelings about the person of another colour as well as feelings about self. Children seem to pick up non-verbal cues from the adults around them: facial expression and tone of voice may be enough to indicate whether an adult approves or disapproves or is simply neutral. So even before the child knows from experience what members of other racial groups are like, the child may already be developing a negative

orientation. If adults have strong prejudices they will also make statements that reveal their feelings, and they will probably discourage their children from playing with children from the other racial group. By the time children enter the school they bring with them attitudes which by and large are a reflection of the attitudes they have taken over from the people around them.

differences in self-image of majority and minority group children

There are differences, however, between the perceptions by children of the majority group and those by the children of the minority group, and generally it is the majority group which is prejudiced against the minority group. This prejudice can profoundly affect the self-image of the members of the minority group. In the American studies before the 1960's it was frequently found that young black children made many of the same disparaging remarks about black people that white children made. To be white was desirable, to be black was not. Some black children also did not clearly identify with their own group, apparently because they took over negative stereotypes about their race. Research showed that when children had to choose between black dolls and white dolls in response to the request, "Give me the doll that looks like you," one-third of the black children chose the white doll. This was not due to being unable to discriminate racial difference based on colour, for several studies have shown that black children become aware of racial differences earlier than white children. They seemed to have a heightened awareness of the negative connotations that go with being black, and hence were reluctant to identify with being black. It must be noted, however, that more recent research in the United States indicates that black children no longer accept so easily the negative stereotypes about their race. Deliberate movements to raise the consciousness of black people — to become aware of their own "roots" and of their own power to influence political decisions, and make an impact on economic developments — have brought this about. The often-repeated slogan, "Black is beautiful", was not meant as a statement of fact but as an imperative to live up to. No doubt, quite a few whites have also changed their perceptions of blacks. So, education can and must play a part in race relations too.

changes in race stereotypes in the U.S.A.

minority children in Alberta

While one has to be careful in generalizing and in applying research carried out in the U.S.A. to the situation in Alberta, because conditions in Alberta surely are different, nevertheless there are parallels. A little girl from

an Asiatic Indian family which had recently settled in Edmonton came home from kindergarten looking sad. Hugging her grandmother she said: "Why am I so dark? Why am I not pretty like the other kids?" Children from minorities soon become aware of many differences other than colour that set them and their families apart from the majority. When they start to play more and more outside their own home with other children and visit other homes, they notice, for instance, that different foods are being served, or that neither the other parents nor children understand the language the minority family speaks at home, or that many families celebrate Christmas while their own family does not. Increasingly children from minority families experience that in some ways they and their own families are different from others. Two social worlds are beginning to be distinguished: the primary world of the family network, and a wider world which opens up interesting new possibilities and to which minority children growing up in Alberta also want to belong. By the time these children reach kindergarten and elementary school there can be tensions between the need and the desire to belong to the one, and the need and the desire to belong to the other.

two social worlds: possible tensions

Two recent studies of immigrant families in Alberta throw some light on how children from ethnic minorities experience "being different". The first is a study of recent Korean immigrants whose children are now in elementary school (30). The second is a comprehensive study of German immigrant families who came to Alberta in the 1950's. This study, which is an in-depth analysis of German immigrant children "Growing Up Canadian" (31), also contains information about the whole of the school experiences of the people interviewed, though, of course, in recollection. Koreans may be described as a visible minority, the Germans not. What is striking under these circumstances is the number of similarities between the experiences of the Korean and the German children with regard to "being different" from the majority or the mainstream. There is therefore no need here to describe both studies; we can confine ourselves to looking at the study of the Korean children.

"being different": two Alberta studies

In all the Korean families Korean was spoken at home, and parents wanted their children to preserve the mother tongue. The children always spoke Korean to their grandparents, but in speaking to their parents they

sometimes introduced English. Outside the home the children generally refused to communicate with their brothers and sisters in anything but English. Among the reasons these children gave for not wanting to speak Korean to other Korean children while at school are: "Other kids laugh at you if you speak Korean" and "It's strange talking Korean with Korean friends at school." In public places such as shopping centres they would also feel embarrassed to use their mother tongue with other Korean children. They had mixed feelings about speaking Korean to their parents when going shopping, and mostly avoided doing so.

implications for school

Such findings could be seen as invalidating some of the advice given to teachers in the 1982 Alberta Education "Guidelines for English as Second Language Programming" (32). The guidelines suggest, for instance, that teachers should ask children to bring objects from home that reflect their own background, and to let children explain them to their classmates, and that teachers should consider setting up international clubs and organizing cultural evenings. It could be argued that such programs might embarrass children, who are trying hard not to draw attention to themselves as being different from the large majority of children. The advice nevertheless seems sound because carefully planned and carefully executed events of this type could not only help minority group children to feel good about their cultural identity but would also provide an enriching experience for the rest of the class. However — and this is a warning — it takes a sensitive and imaginative teacher to carry it out in such a way that minority groups are not embarrassed by being singled out.

implications for kindergarten

At kindergarten level the situation is quite different because children of kindergarten age generally are eager to talk about their experiences. To let minority group children speak of their home background and to let them bring objects to school that are treasured at home might help these children at an early age to feel special rather than inferior. The kindergarten situation offers many opportunities, planned and improvised, for introducing children to other worlds: make believe and role play, and story telling. As far as stories are concerned, a resourceful kindergarten teacher might draw on literary and oral traditions other than the European and include among the stories read or told to the children some that are taken from other cultures. To

mention only two of many possible choices, there are beautiful Indian epics and African folk tales that would delight children.

Finally, we need to remind ourselves that children of all ages, including pre-school children, are participating in the same real world in which the adults have their hopes and fears. They are, as we stressed all along, co-responsive participants in a common world. At this point we cannot do better than to quote from Lea Dasberg, a professor in Holland, who has written a book entitled *Bringing Up Children by Keeping Them Down* (33). In a recent article she writes: "And how do children see the real world? That depends on how adults *show* them the world." She then traces how, beginning in the eighteenth century in middle class and aristocratic families, and from 1900 on for most children in Western countries, the world of childhood was separated from that of adults:

bringing up children by keeping them down

> There was a time that we adults did not show children the world at all for fear that it was too difficult for them to understand, too cruel, too threatening . . . We brought into shape a world of childhood, a world of toys and nannies and books especially written for children and telling them only about children and never about sorrow, death, poverty, war, sickness, prisons, sexuality, cruelty, and all the other troubles of the world of adults. We kept children in the nursery like tiny plants that could not bear storm, hail, cold, and rain in the open air . . . Parents and teachers . . . were attuned to speak in the pupils' language, to treat them by **their** codes, to tell them stories confirming **their** fantasy and never introduced them to anything of adult feelings, adult emotions, adult fears, adult problems. I explained in my book how puberty as a separate time in life full of problems and **Weltschmerz** came into being by this childish treatment far away from reality, because the young person at the age of 13 to 17 years suddenly had to confront reality after being unconscious of its existence during all his former life. (34).

children's orientation to future

Children, as we have repeatedly stressed, are eager to get to know the world and to make sense of it. Most young children think, dream, and talk about the future: what they will do tomorrow, next year when they are bigger, and one day when they are grown up. But what if the real world of adults seems senseless to them?

escape from real world of adults

Dasberg speaks of three responses that are common among adolescents and are increasingly observed among much younger persons: escape into drugs and alcohol, escape into mysticism and cults, and escape into suicide. We comment on only one of these, namely suicide.

suicide among children

Suicide is a phenomenon which has always been associated with adults, and to a minor extent with adolescents. In the past twenty years suicide has become more frequent among adolescents, and also among children ten to fourteen years old; there are perturbing recent reports of suicide of children of pre-school age. There are many different reasons for children's suicides. According to Dasberg, the most important reason for the rise in the suicide rate among young children is that children develop a perception of the world as senseless and purposeless and doomed. They reject the adult world into which they are supposed to grow, because they feel it to be an evil world and one that offers no hope to them. Dasberg quotes an expert on children's suicide as saying: "The last thing these young persons want is to be an adult . . . because they do not want anything to do at all with the 'real' world as they see it." One can hear children today saying: "I don't want to grow up!" This seems to be a new phenomenon but the film *The Tin Drum*, based on the 1959 novel by Guenther Grass, gives symbolic-allegorical expression to it in the life of the main character who, as a boy of three, decides not to grow up because he cannot face the world of the grown-ups. By an act of sheer will he succeeds in remaining a physical dwarf and develops awesome power to shatter glass with well-aimed shrill screams. He uses this power to exercise control over the adults.

refusal to grow up

anxieties of children and responses of adults

However, outside the world of fiction children do not have this power to control the adults. What aggravates their situation is that they cannot put into words their nightmarish anxieties. Parents and caregivers, in their turn, are often oblivious of the source of anxieties of the children in their care. If they do notice their anxieties they may not take them seriously enough.

what parents and teachers can do

What are parents and teachers to do? Firstly, they need to face the fact that children are exposed to so many sources of information today that, even if it were desirable to do so (which it is not), it is impossible to hide from children the harsh realities of a world in which there is unemployment and hunger, in which children are abducted and terrorist acts are committed, in which there is war and brutal killing, in which acid rain kills fish and forests, and in which people live in fear of a nuclear holocaust. Even children of two may get snippets of information from television and radio which they do not understand, but what they pick up is so laden with emotion that it becomes

burdensome to them. Secondly, parents and teachers too need to give the children opportunities to talk about the information and the impressions that have reached them, and to answer their questions at a level appropriate to their understanding. Children and adults have to share the responsibility of creating a world in which there is hope for survival and for lives worth living.

To sum up the thrust of this paper Lea Dasberg will be quoted once again, for what she has to say links up with the opening paragraph of this paper, where child development is defined as human development and childhood seen as a particular time-span of the total life-span that extends from birth to death:

> I do not see children as a separate kind of creature but as human beings with the responsibility of human beings, only a little smaller, a little weaker, a little less experienced, and with a little less knowledge. So we have to make them bigger, stronger, more experienced . . . For that we have to inform them about everything in the world. It is their world too, . . .

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